



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

Office of Public Affairs

DOT 156-09
Thursday, October 1, 2009
Contact: USDOT Public Affairs
Tel: 202-366-4570

U.S. Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood Announces Administration Wide Effort to Combat Distracted Driving

WASHINGTON – At the conclusion of a two-day summit on distracted driving in Washington, D.C. today, U.S. Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood announced a series of concrete actions the Obama Administration and the U.S. Department of Transportation (USDOT) are taking to help put an end to distracted driving.

Last night, President Obama signed an Executive Order directing federal employees not to engage in text messaging while driving government-owned vehicles; when using electronic equipment supplied by the government while driving; or while driving privately owned vehicles when they're on official government business. The order also encourages federal contractors and others doing business with the government to adopt and enforce their own policies banning texting while driving on the job.

"This order sends a very clear signal to the American public that distracted driving is dangerous and unacceptable. It shows that the federal government is leading by example," said Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood. "I fully expect that all 58,000 DOT employees and contractors will take this order seriously. Let's show our friends and families that we can resist the temptation to answer the phone, send a message, or allow some other distraction to interfere with our driving."

Secretary LaHood pledged to work with Congress to ensure that the issue of distracted driving is appropriately addressed. He also announced a number of immediate actions the Department is taking to combat distracted driving, including the Department's plan to create three separate rulemakings that would consider:

- * Making permanent restrictions on the use of cell phones and other electronic devices in rail operations.
- * Banning text messaging altogether, and restrict the use of cell phones by truck and interstate bus operators.
- * Disqualifying school bus drivers convicted of texting while driving, from maintaining their commercial driver's licenses.

The Secretary also called on state and local governments to work with USDOT to reduce fatalities and crashes by making distracted driving part of their state highway plans, and by continuing to pass state and local laws against distracted driving in all types of vehicles, especially school buses. He asked states and local governments to back up public awareness campaigns with high-visibility enforcement actions. And he said the Department is establishing an on-line clearinghouse on the

risks of distracted driving, aimed especially at young people, which will give them information to help encourage good decisions.

Secretary LaHood also pledged to continue the Department's research on how to best combat distracted driving. As part of this pledge, the Department will launch a new demonstration program this year to evaluate techniques that states can use to get the most out of their efforts to end this destructive behavior.

"Keeping Americans safe is without question the federal government's highest priority – and that includes safety on the road, as well as on mass transit and rail," said Secretary LaHood. "I'm greatly encouraged by the work accomplished at this summit. Working together, we're going to make sure that traveling in America is as safe as it can possibly be and I strongly encourage the public to take personal responsibility for their behavior and show a healthy respect for the rules of the road."

The two-day summit brought together safety experts, researchers, industry representatives, elected officials and members of the public who shared their expertise, experiences and ideas for reducing distracted driving behavior and addressed the safety risk posed by this growing problem across all modes of transportation. Authoritative speakers from around the nation led interactive sessions on a number of key topics including the extent and impact of distracted driving, current research, regulations and best practices. Individuals from 49 states participated in the summit via the web.

The summit also featured a discussion with Seventeen Editor-in-Chief Ann Shoket and three young adults that explored the dangers of texting and driving. High school classrooms across the country tuned into the youth geared program and heard insights from Reggie Shaw, 22, and Nicole Meredith, 18, both of whom caused car crashes because they were texting while behind the wheel. Reggie and Nicole were joined by Natalie Hayford, 17, a teen advocate with the Anoka, Minnesota chapter of Students Against Destructive Decisions (SADD). Natalie works with her school and community to try and educate people her age about the dangers of distracted driving.

Together with the National Organizations for Youth Safety (NOYS) and the National Road Safety Foundation (NRSF), the group announced the Drive for Life PSA contest. The contest challenges kids and teens to submit a PSA concept on combating distracted or impaired driving and the winner will be sent to New York City to help producers actually put their PSA together. Additional information on the challenge can be found at www.noys.org or www.nrsf.org.

To watch Secretary LaHood's video blog on distracted driving visit www.dot.gov. The full webcast of the summit will be available later this week on www.dot.gov.

###